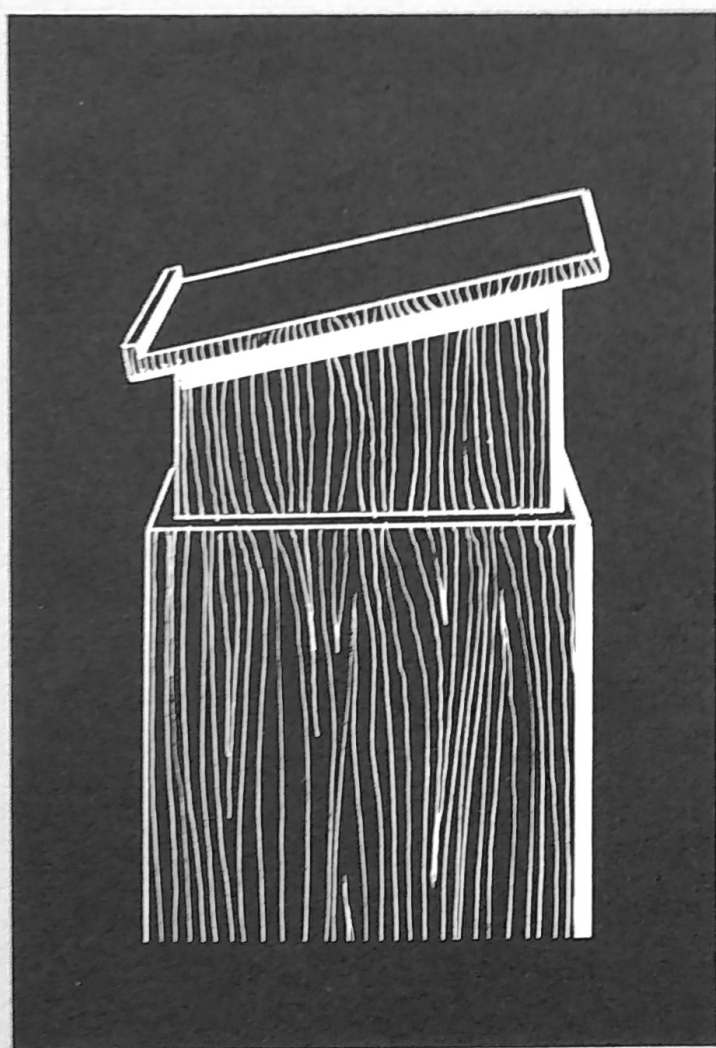


**“THINK  
IT THROUGH”**



**ROBERT LEFEVRE**



## ROBERT LEFEVRE

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# "THINK IT THROUGH"



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at the annual meeting  
of the National Aviation Trades Association,  
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As one of my economist friends advised me, one of America's major depressed areas is the area of the mind.

This is, as has been noted in many quarters, the principal area of unemployment in the nation. And to alleviate that condition of unemployment is my hope and purpose.

What does it mean to think?

Alas, in far too many quarters, the process has been relegated to that of repeating the last cliché one has heard, which in theory is supposed to indicate that we agree with the person who uttered the cliché. But in principle, even the cliché is probably nothing but a gossamer echo of someone's ambition or hope for advancement, cloaked in terms that are calculated to inspire belief that some honest mental endeavor preceded the utterance.

To think at all, means to reason from principle. Without principles on which to base our reasoning processes, we are like a pilot alone in a foggy night, sans instruments, sans radar, sans radio contact, and, melancholy thought, probably sans gasoline. Lack-



ing any and all of these devices on which to base his decisions, a disaster is almost certain.

What, then, are principles? Principles are fixed rules of conduct based on reality. No one knows all the principles that exist. Few of us know more than a very small number. Some, it would appear, are convinced that the only principle in existence is the principle that there are no principles.

But because we are interested in the thinking process we are, unavoidably, drawn to that realm of inquiry which I will call praxeology. . . . the science of human action. We do not know many principles in this field. But there are a few on which I trust we will find speedy agreement.

First: Man is a rational animal. This is to say man is a creature who does whatever he does, for reasons. His reasons may not always be rational in themselves, but to him they are valid. And he is motivated by them.

Second: There is a common denominator in all motival action. When man chooses to act, he chooses to act because he believes gain will result from his action. If he chooses not to act, it is because he believes he will gain more by not acting than by acting.

Whether man's actions relate to earning money, eating food, buying a house, or dating a lady of his choice, man seeks gain. He seeks to obtain something he does not have at the moment his action is initiated. Or, if he elects not to act, it is because he believes that were he to act he would lose, or would make fewer gains than he presently has made.

In other words, man, by his nature, seeks

to conduct himself in a manner that will result in an improvement in his situation. He seeks gain.

Let me use the word which has so baneful a reputation that it is shunned in certain erudite company . . . man seeks, ALWAYS, to make a PROFIT.

Now by profit, I do not necessarily mean a dollar profit. It is true, of course, that dollar profits motivate us mightily, and that they should. But man, by his nature, has a value scale built into his mental mechanism by means of which he values everything entering his sphere of awareness. Some men place dollars at the top of this scale. Others place other things: the acclaim of crowds; artistic expression or appreciation; personal relationships; a vacation at the beach; a new sports roadster; a nine-course banquet.

These values we all evince are never fixed. They fluctuate within the individual with the passing of time and they vary between individuals.

Let me illustrate.

Let us suppose that I wish to buy a hat. What do I do? I go into town to a hat store to shop for one, of course. And let us suppose that in a particular hat store I find one to my liking. There at the store they have many hats of all sizes, shapes, colors and prices. But I find one I like and on it is a tag that says, \$10.

I say to the storekeeper, "I like this hat and will buy it."

Does this mean that I think the hat is worth \$10? No, it does not. It really means that, to me, the hat is worth MORE than \$10

for I am willing to give up \$10 in order to get the hat.

Is my value judgment correct about the hat? No one can say.

What about the storekeeper? Does he think the hat is worth MORE than \$10? No, he does not, or he would have put a higher price on the hat. The storekeeper's view of the value of the hat is quite different from my view.

In fact, when the storekeeper put the tag on the hat that said \$10, he was serving public notice to the world that as far as he was concerned the hat was NOT worth \$10. For he said as plainly as he knew how that he would RATHER have \$10 than that particular hat.

He thinks the hat is worth *less* than \$10. I think it is worth *more* than \$10.

So, we trade. I get what is profitable to me — something that to me is worth more than \$10, for which I only have to give \$10. The storekeeper gets something that is worth more than the hat, as far as he knows.

Did the storekeeper cheat me? Did I cheat the storekeeper?

Neither of us cheated the other. Each of us did what we wanted to do and each of us made a profit. He made a profit because he undoubtedly paid less for the hat than he sold it for. But I made a profit because I got something worth more TO ME than \$10. Otherwise, because I was free to buy or not to buy, I would have kept the \$10.

Notice what each of us did. We traded from a position of surplus in order to take care of our scarcity. The storekeeper had

hats. He had a scarcity of ten-dollar bills. I had a ten-dollar bill (not in surplus, surely, but at least I had that) and I did not have a hat. So I satisfied my scarcity. And the storekeeper satisfied his scarcity.

What is wrong with that process? Nothing. That is the way business works when government does not interfere.

Now the reason I have taken this much time in establishing this tiny ledge of logic in the area of praxeology is because, as I indicated at the outset, I am concerned with the thinking process. I have said that we are supposed to "think it thru."

Very well.

Now, if you review briefly what I have already said you will discern a principle. It is the principle we could call freedom of choice.

Since, by his nature, each man has his own scale of values; since, by his nature, each man's scale of values is relative and constantly shifting, it follows that for man to fulfill his nature, he must be free to choose. It will not serve his purpose at all for others to make his choices for him. Others may advise him, of course. And all of us can benefit by the counsel and experience we can acquire at little cost from others. Advice is usually plentiful and inexpensive, especially if we ignore it.

But the whole nature of human life is tied into the choosing facility and we all have it. Never mind the advice and counsel we receive, when it comes to making a decision, EACH HUMAN BEING MUST DECIDE FOR HIMSELF, or he will deny and contravene his own nature.



As a matter of fact, so basic is the principle of free choice, that men WILL make up their own minds in spite of all, unless force is introduced to prevent them. And FORCE is the antithesis of the thinking process.

When reason fails, when logic is forsaken, when patience is gone . . . . then, with the mind exhausted or, at least, out of gear . . . . then we call upon force as the single factor with which men cannot reason.

Let me apply this thought directly to the aviation industry and NATA.

Here is a magnificent, highly energetic, deeply resourceful group of men voluntarily united in a trades association for their mutual benefit. I not only have no problem with this, I commend your efforts in this regard. Here we have men joined in common purpose, yet each one retaining a high degree of competitive awareness. Is there force in evidence? Not here. The men who are present in this gathering are here voluntarily. Not a one of them was forced to come at the point of a gun. Oh, it is probably true that for some the cost of coming was much higher than for others. Some may be present because the boss said: "Go on out to that NATA meeting and bring me back a report." Such a man might have had his own plans which he valued, per se, more than he valued the boss's plans. Even so, he was not forced. He simply weighed the values. He could quit. Or he could come. He weighed the consequences of the two alternatives and he came. Or else he isn't here now.

But this isn't what is meant by my use of the word, force.

This is an instance in which relative values are weighed and each individual selects the course of action most profitable to him, all costs considered. That is all.

But I will tell you where force does enter our area of concern. And it enters thru the front door in the aviation industry. Worse, it has frequently entered that door by the active wish of some members of the industry, by their express invitation.

That force, gentlemen, is the force of government.

I beg of you, do not misunderstand me. I cast no aspersions on the men employed in various agencies of government. They, too, and I am quite certain of this, are human. I mean no personal disparagement whatsoever. I mean merely to be analytical. I mean to show you that government, by *its* nature, not by the nature of the men employed by it, IS an agency of force and violence and has no rational chore to perform in the aviation industry.

What is government? There are numerous definitions available. Some simply state that it is an agency of force, and let it go at that. I will be more precise. Government is a group of men who sell protection and retaliation to the inhabitants of a limited geographic area at monopolistic prices.

Government exists for the purpose of exerting force by some upon others. It is conceived in its supposed facility to use force in a protective capacity. This is why people turn to government . . . . for protection. But in operation, government BY ITS NATURE must commit predation.

It is not that men in government are "bad"

men. It is that the mechanism we call government, to operate at all, must operate in a predatory manner.

Government is a gun. It even has a legislative chamber which can be compared to the chamber in a revolver. It is loaded with bullets we call laws and regulations and decrees and commands and restrictions and ukases. The man who is called upon to operate this mechanism, pulls the trigger. It is the only mechanism government has. When the trigger is pulled, a regulation is propelled out upon the people, an industry, a segment of the economy by the hot gases engendered in its wake.

The mechanism is neither moral nor immoral, it is a-moral. It just works. Like any gun, it has no built-in conscience. The mechanism can be triggered by a saint or a sadist. It works exactly the same way in either case.

But note this, please. It does not operate by itself. No more than an airplane flies by itself, does a government operate by itself.

Even a plane controlled by remote radio commands, is being operated by men. If a plane is ever controlled by an automatic computer, it will still be operated by the men who feed into the computer the data by means of which the controls will be managed. So with government.

And this fact, gentlemen, brings me to an unhappy philosophic dilemma. Men have created the aviation industry. From the first halting and faulty concepts dating back centuries, to the magnificence of a jet fleet of transports today, men have done it all. Free men able to choose have done it all.

I am not trying to say that the only pro-

gress ever made has been made in America, presumably a "free" country. Not at all. Men the world over are much the same. All men have the endowed facility of free choice.

And whenever they have been free to choose, they have chosen courses of action which they fondly hoped would result in their gain and their profit. Sometimes, they chose unwisely. But even they who did, and who paid with their lives for inadequate research, inadequate training, inadequate decisions, even they have served us all and served us well. We have learned, not only by the things we ourselves have done correctly but by the things others have done incorrectly. Even an error is the result of thought, improper though it may be.

Now, let us examine the aviation industry, vis a vis what we call government. What has the government given to aviation?

Before you answer that question, reflect a moment. Government is a gun. Do guns build airliners? Do guns arrange airline schedules? Do guns operate airports?

Do guns invent, devise, plan and implement? Take the gun away from government and what do you have? You have men.

What is the difference between aviation as a thing in itself and government as a thing in itself? Men make both mechanisms work. The only discernible difference is the gun which characterizes the government and which is always lacking in all enterprise by virtue of the basic nature of enterprise.

Now, what has government given to aviation? It has given nothing. I am sorry, gentlemen. It has given NOT ONE THING. It has taken.



Ah, but I can hear you say: "Government has made aviation more safe."

No, it has not.

That is the illusion carried over from the idea that government sells protection.

Did government invent anything? Can a gun contrive? No. Men have made the safety devices. Men have struggled to provide better, faster, cheaper, more reasonably secure flying. And men have financed these things by dint of much labor. They have run risks and they have performed Herculean feats.

"But government has set standards of excellence to which we are compelled to adhere." Did someone say that?

I deny it. The aviation industry provided those standards. True, there are rules which are now . . . I use the common term . . . ENFORCED. Is it the enforcement which we admire, or the intrinsic merit of the rules which, I repeat, were first made possible by the aviation people themselves? Are the rules obeyed because they are sound rules or are they obeyed because fines, imprisonment and FORCE are invoked?

You answer the question.

But here is the real problem, gentlemen. When standards of excellence are ENFORCED there is, almost by common consent, a tendency to slacken in the search for excellence. Government enforced MINIMUM standards have a strange way of becoming arbitrary MAXIMUM standards. And these standards are maintained until some air tragedy tells us that the excellence just wasn't enough. Then we go to work again.

But now the whole case for aviation is cluttered up, not by the creative, productive men in the business, but by the bureaucratic red tape and cost of forcefully invoked supervision.

You have put your own industry in the vise of regulation by external forces. And these forces slow down, hamper and impair you in your search for true progress.

But there is still another factor to be reckoned with, the factor of cost. I would hazard a guess that were the airlines industries entirely removed from the tax rolls, permitted to keep and use their own earnings, totally, within a very short time there would be no airline in the nation requiring a subsidy. Nor would there be call for government aid in getting an airport.

But there is more to it than this. For government has an effect, not only on the airline industry itself, but on the entire economy. Your government aid is coming, not only from your own incomes, but from the incomes of millions who will never use an airplane. And the costs of aviation have risen each time a new regulation is invoked, a new control put on to hamper, a new ukase delivered.

The theory grows, and I have already touched upon it briefly, that were it not for government, planes could not fly, or if they did, they would all crash.

The public is made to believe that men in any industry, aviation included, are so hare-brained and so inconsiderate of the costs involved, that they would delight in wrecking planes IN ORDER TO MAKE A PROFIT.

Can you imagine that? As though any pi-



... would deliberately miscalculate. As though a tragedy left no dent on the thinking or the pocketbooks of those within aviation.

Gentlemen, you are at a crucial point in the development of aviation. You can go on from here as you have tended to do in the immediate past, tied down by government, regulated by government, taxed by government, controlled by government. Or you can throw off these unnecessary and primitive reliances upon FORCE and reach again for the stars as you did in the beginning.

And as a first step, in the course I hope you will pursue, let me suggest that you stop invoking the force of government upon your competition!

If you wish to win over your competition, stop calling on the guns of government and win by superior performance. In a market that is freely competitive, some will fail. Let them fail. In an open and competitive market there will always be room *above* the clouds.

I know you, people of aviation. You are human. Deeply within you, you wish your industry to prosper, to persevere, to operate at the highest moral levels. But you cannot be moral, nor prosper, nor forever persevere, if you use force to try to make other people moral, if you use force to collect your deficits, if you use force against those who challenge your segment of supremacy in the market.

Since the dawn of man upon this planet, men have yearned to be free. The history of the human race is the history of men's repeated struggles against their oppressors who

have invariably instituted controls over them "for their own good."

Primitive men tamed the horse and used it, sometimes, as a symbol of the freedom they sought. Early American pioneers created the iron horse, and it, too, became a symbol of man's dreams to conquer empty space and reach out into the unknown.

But you, in aviation, have the supreme challenge. You have in your keeping, the most exciting symbol of man's upward thrust toward freedom . . . the airplane.

Let's get this straight. Your industry is NOT mature. It is no more mature than any of us are. In the long evolvement of the species, man stands at an open doorway and there is more ahead of us than lies behind. So with aviation.

Throw off your shackles and put down your guns.

Think it thru.

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